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ABSTRACT

With the recent U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Initiative there has been a proliferation of after-school programs emerging in rural, suburban, and urban school communities across the country. Although these programs are financially supported through the federal government, the grants are only funded for a 3-year period. Given the short duration of the federal support for these programs and the fact that education innovations generally take time to become established and well-running programs, this research sheds light on what variables are needed for successful after-school programs. The document reports the results of an evaluation that was conducted on five after-school programs in northeastern Kansas. Its purpose was to present a context and a composite picture of the after-school program, to establish baseline data against which the programs can be evaluated over the course of the 3-year project, to identify best practices and characteristics of quality after-school programs in the region, to facilitate a continuous monitoring of the program and suggest areas where improvements might be made to enhance program quality, and to determine the impact the program had on participants and to what degree program objectives had been realized. (Contains 16 references and 22 endnotes.) (DFR)

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Critical Characteristics of Successful After-School Programs: An Evaluation of the 21st Century Initiative

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Critical Characteristics of Successful After-School Programs:
An Evaluation of the 21st Century Initiative

Introduction to the Study

With the recent U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Initiative there has been a proliferation of after-school programs emerging in rural, suburban, and urban school communities across the country. While these programs are financially supported through the federal government the current duration of the grant is for a three-year period of time. Given the short duration of the federal support for these programs and the fact that starting any new educational innovation generally takes time to become an established and well-running program, this research sheds light on what variables are needed for successful after-school programs. It also raises a number of questions concerning the dilemmas encountered in trying to implement quality programs that have a short funding cycle – putting energy into ensuring excellence or addressing sustainability, and which focus should takes precedence. While the government's absolute priority goal for programs funded during the 1999/00 school year was to expand learning opportunities for children and youth in the community, this research reveals contradictions between stakeholder groups in what this means. This research also makes a contribution to the "after school field" in addressing one of the biggest challenges facing after-school programs today – identifying the key ingredients of a quality program.

This study reports the results of an evaluation that was conducted on five after-school programs in North-east Kansas. The purpose of the evaluation was to 1) develop a context and composite picture of the after-school programs; 2) establish baseline data against which the programs can be evaluated over the course of the three year project; 3) identify best practices and characteristics of quality after-school programs in the region; 4) facilitate a continuous monitoring process for the program and suggest areas where improvements might be made to enhance program quality; and 5) determine the impact the program had on participants and to what degree program objectives had been realized.

Theoretical Framework Grounding the Study

For all 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the federal government requires that a "strong evaluation plan that will shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period," is included in the proposal to secure funds for these programs.[1] The RFP is very specific in detailing what a comprehensive evaluation should include, i.e., the types of data that will be collected, when data will be collected, the design, methods, and instrumentation used to collect data, how the data will be analyzed, and when and how reports of results and outcomes will become available and used. Ironically, the formal evaluation procedures requested by the federal government for reporting and accountability purposes of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiatives are grounded in a very technical measurement approach primarily based on gathering test score and performance data. This "performance report" primarily consists of reporting outcomes data such as student achievement test scores, teacher grades in the core content areas (i.e., math and reading), which for the most part are arbitrary, and attendance and behavior data (which again basically consist of arbitrary teacher data). Instead what is needed, as identified by Seligson, founder of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, are

> studies that...look at the whole ecology of the program – the quality, the activities, etc.– not just at educational outcomes. The definition of desired outcomes should be broad so that one does not look only at test scores, but also the social and emotional development of the child, which is tantamount to doing well in school and in life.[2]

Thus, the theoretical framework guiding this study (and the evaluation plan written into this successfully funded program) was the CIPP Model which is based on the view that the most important purpose of an evaluation process is not to prove but to improve.[3] Unlike first generation models of evaluation that focus on measurement issues or second generation models which describe patterns of strengths and weaknesses in respect to specific objectives, the CIPP model, one of several third generation evaluation models was used.[4] While associated with making judgments concerning the program under evaluation, the CIPP framework focuses on decision-making processes that need to occur at all levels of program implementation and in a formative sense, facilitates program improvement, which is one of the major goals of evaluation of after-school programs.[5] The CIPP evaluation model elements are context, input, process, and product. Given the short three-year funding cycle of this program and the fact that local sustainability efforts would be based on the presumed effectiveness of the program, it was important to use a comprehensive evaluation process that would provide insight into all aspects of the program – from the conception of the after-school program model to the actual implementation at each of the sites.

In the CIPP model, context is the institutional context or setting within which decisions are made. In studying context one also examines "whether existing goals and priorities are attuned to the needs of whoever is being served."[6] Especially crucial, as in the case of the after-school programs focusing this research, was to study the context and the unique set of variables in each school/community that either served to support or create a barrier to successful implementation. Input in the CIPP model identifies and assesses the system capabilities, strategies, and procedural designs for implementing the program. Thus it was important to look at the program as a whole and to also look at the unique variables at each of the five sites, human and non human variables, that either facilitated or inhibited implementation of the program model.

Addressing the process component allows for decisions concerning how well the implementation of the plan is actually occurring, or the fidelity of the model to the actual program that is being implemented. It was critical to determine to what degree the various program components were actually being implemented at each individual site and then to understand "why" if the program was not being implemented as defined. A determination of the degree of program fidelity facilitated decisions for professional development and program improvement during the second year of operation. Finally, product evaluation measures, interprets, and judges pro- gram outcomes and determines to what extent the program has met the needs of the clients it was intended to serve.

Whereas many evaluation schemata look at individual aspects of the program and often use measurement models of evaluation, the CIPP model enabled a system or "holistic" view of the whole ecology of the program. Using a holistic approach, such as the CIPP model, facilitated an indepth examination of these after-school programs that went far beyond looking only at outcomes. This study provided valuable data, in a formative sense, that was subsequently used during the second year of the program's operation as a means to improve the existing program and address the issues raised during the initial evalu- ation process. Unlike traditional third generation models of evaluation that posit the evaluator in a judgmental role regarding the programs merit and worth, the process of inquiry used in this study was also grounded in principles of responsive evaluation in which the issues, concerns, and views of multiple stake- holders were taken into consideration.[7] Stakeholders were given opportunities to define the issues and questions they felt critical to address in the context of their own site. The evaluation process, itself, involved multiple stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, teachers, principals, site coordinators and staff, the program coordinator, community volunteers, and members of the advisory committee) in co-constructing a picture of what these Community Learning Centers looked like and defining to what degree the varying needs were addressed.

Methods of Inquiry

Methodology guiding this research was grounded in qualitative methods and based on naturalistic inquiry principles.[8] Among these principles is how one views the nature of reality. Contrary to positivism that asserts that reality is single, tangible, and fragmentable, this researcher embraced the notion that realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic. When a program involves and impacts multiple stakeholders, each brings to bear on the evaluation process their perceptions and interpretations of reality. The role of the evaluator becomes one of sifting and sorting through these multiple versions of reality to make sense or apply meaning to the phenomenon under study. Another principle addresses the relationship between the knower and the known. Choices and decisions are made throughout the entire evaluation process – which stakeholder groups to include, which to survey, what to observe (and what gets observed and what does not), which stakeholder groups should be interviewed, what questions to ask, what kinds of follow-up questions are required, when to probe for further information, etc. Given this fact, to assert there is independence between the knower and known (as is the case with positivism) seems absurd in that the knower and known are interactive and inseparable. While there are ways to ensure checks and balances during the evaluation process, to ensure trustworthiness of the data, the fact remains that objectivity in its pure form is an unattainable state. And finally the role of values. While positivist believe that evaluation can and should be value free, this evaluator believes that evaluation is value-bounded. When one evaluates programs against standards of quality – one must realize that values determine and define what is quality. When an evaluator is judging program effectiveness one looks for characteristics that exemplify effectiveness; again those characteristics of effectiveness are often the result of what one values to be effective. Rather than dismissing values, it is more important to acknowledge the influence that values have. Lincoln and Guba contend, "Such a course is infinitely to be preferred to continuing in the self-delusion that methodology can and does protect one from their unwelcome incursions!"[9]

Multiple methods were used because according to Denzin and Lincoln, "the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured."[10] While data collection methods were primarily qualitative in nature, quantitative data were also collected. These included:

- Standardized state assessment instruments, district assessment/evaluation tools, and pre and post curriculum-based measurements. These data were used primarily to track academic growth, discipline referrals, attendance, and numbers of activities in which children participated.

- Surveys of teachers, parents, community volunteers, student assistants, and after-school staff ascertaining their perceived value of the after-school program and their perceptions of the impact the program had on children and the communities in which they were located. In addition to Likert scale and rank ordering items, surveys also asked open-ended questions. Parents and teachers were surveyed at mid-year to ascertain their beliefs about, and satisfaction with the program and to offer suggestions for program improvement. They were surveyed again at the end of the year.

- Surveys of site coordinators examining to what degree their programs aligned with the designated program model and determining what value coordinators placed on each of the program components. They were also asked their opinions about the coordination and administrative functions of the program director and were asked to critically self-reflect on their own roles as site coordinators.

- At midyear an attempt was made to collect data that would give insight into students' level of resiliency, but because of privacy concerns voiced by several of the site coordinators, the survey

wasn't completed by all sites.

Qualitative methods included:

- Focus group interviews with advisory committee members, program staff, and select parents to examine the value and the degree of success the program had during its first year of operation. A pre- and post- focus group was conducted with teachers at one of the program sites – prior to the beginning of the program to learn their issues and concerns and to get input into program design and again at the end of the first year to determine if their issues and concerns had been addressed and to hear their reactions and responses to the program. A focus group with site coordinators was also conducted mid-year to determine the progress being made with the programs and to learn about needed changes.

- Individual interviews were conducted with students, parents, principals and the program director. Students were asked what they liked and did not like, about the program, why they attended the program, and what benefits they felt the program had on them, as students. In addition to examining the value and benefits of the program, principals were also asked to define what they believed principal support looked like. The program director went through an extensive interview that addressed all aspects of the program – from planning to implementation, and her perceptions of the value, benefits, and concerns for succeeding years.

  Both the focus groups and individual interviews were transcribed. A content analysis was conducted to examine patterns and themes that emerged from the data in the interview transcripts.

- Non-participant observation consisted of fifteen 3-hour observations that included three separate visits per site with the first visit occurring in September-October 1999, the second visit during January-February 2000, and the third visit during May, 2000. The purpose of the site observations was to develop a composite picture of what each CLC program looked like, to observe how individual sites were operationalizing the program model, and to talk informally to staff, parents, and children attending the program. All observations used a standard observation form that segmented the observation into blocks of time and recorded activities teachers and children were engaged in. Anecdotal data supplemented the actual observation.

  An analysis of the observations was facilitated by the National School-Age Care Alliance Standards that list quality standards for after-school programs addressing human relationships; indoor and outdoor environment; safety, health, and nutrition; and administration program indicators.[11]

Research Questions Guiding the Evaluation

Table I presents the original framework that guided the evaluation listing the evaluation questions, the indicators, and data sources. Minor changes were made throughout the year.

Table 1 – Evaluation Framework		
Evaluation Questions (what we want to know)	**Key Indicators (what we are measuring)**	**Data Sources/Methods (how we are measuring it)**
1. What educational benefits have occurred as a result of the CLCs?	Performance on the Kansas state assessments Indicators of reading achievement Indicators of math achievement	State assessment data Standardized test scores Pre-post and continuous curriculum based assessment in reading and math
2. What social benefits have occurred as a result of the CLCs?	Indicators of increased resiliency, e.g., insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity and humor, morality (the difference between right and wrong), and general resiliency	Student interviews Parent interviews and focus group Teacher surveys Site coordinators surveys
3. What behavioral changes are occurring in children as a result of the program?	Indicators of decreased incidences of violence and discipline referrals Indicators of improved student attitudes toward school	Teacher survey Student interviews Parent survey Site coordinator survey
4. To what degree do the CLCs provide youth/community members enriched learning opportunities in a safe, healthy, and drug-free environment?	Reports of activities Parent, community, student perceptions	Student interviews Community volunteer surveys Parent volunteers
5. What types of educational, developmental, and recreational services do the CLCs offer to enhance student resiliency?	Indicators of activities that are planned and implemented	Student activity sign-in sheets Matrix of activities assessing relevance to resiliency framework
6. To what extent are the students most at-risk of academic failure being served?	The number of at-risk student attendees Indicators of increased attendance patterns of children scoring below the 50th percentile and rated as most in need of participation	Teacher referral lists Student test score data Student activity sign-in sheets
7. What is the fidelity of local CLCs to the established program design? Is the model being implemented?	Indicators of how closely the model is followed – the discrepancy between the "ideal" and the "real"	Characteristics of implementation checklist Site Coordinator survey Observations of program implementation
8. How does the local program model compare to criteria for quality after-school programs?	Quality indicators of after-school programs Federal guidance for after-school programs	After-School Program staff surveys and/or checklists from the Nat'l School-Age Care Alliance 21st Century after-school programs surveys
9. How do the CLCs support schools to become centers of the community (opening the schools during out-of-school hours to children, parents and the community)?	Indicators of operation of the after-school program, e.g., hours, days, months Indicators of participation of children, parents, and community members	Checklist of operation procedures Focus group with community Interviews with parents Activity sign-in sheets Rosters of parents and community members

Evaluation Questions (what we want to know)	Key Indicators (what we are measuring)	Data Sources/Methods (how we are measuring it)
10. How do the CLCs support collaboration with school staff and community organizations to provide and sustain services to the community.	Indicators of quality interactions between CLC staff and school staff, community members, and parents The number of parent/community volunteers involved with the CLCs	CLC staff, teacher, parents, community members focus groups Staff documentation of collaboration Survey of staff/teacher collaboration Survey of community members and parent collaboration; observations
11. What is the degree of satisfaction with the CLCs...		
a) from parents? b) from students? c) from classroom teachers? d) from CLC staff?	Indicators of social validity Perceptions of staff in the program	Parent surveys and interviews Student interviews Teacher surveys and focus group CLC staff surveys and focus group

In a participatory evaluation mode, each program site was also given an opportunity to generate question(s) that they wanted answered at the end of the first year. Questions emerged from local Advisory Council meetings. Three of the five sites generated additional questions as part of the overall evaluation process. These questions are beyond the purview of this paper, which is an evaluation study conducted on the general program.

Data Sources

Data sources included all children (n=110) and parents (n=100/response rate 40%) of children who were enrolled in the after-school programs. Also included were elementary teachers from each of the participating schools (n=40/response rate 63%) and elementary principals (n=6/response rate five of six) from each school district. Program staff at each site ranged from three to five employees (dependent on the number of children served). These included one program coordinator per site, paid staff assistants, paid student helpers, and local community volunteers. The project director also provided data about the program.

Context of the After-School Program

In the spring of 1999 the Northeast Kansas Education Service Center (NEKESC) was successful in receiving funding through the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Initiative to establish Community Learning Centers (CLS's) or after-school programs in elementary schools in five school districts: Effingham, Jefferson County North, McLouth, Perry-Lecompton, and Valley Falls.

The model for the Northeast Kansas Community Learning Center (NEKCLC) was based on resiliency research and social development theory and was designed around three major components that included:

1) a focus on strengthening academic skills;

2) planned group time focused on building healthy relationships (the NEKCLC was a pilot site for a project sponsored through the Kansas Health Foundation involving the receipt of curriculum and technical assistance from Foundations, Inc., of Philadelphia); and

3) opportunities for widening students' horizons.

A fourth component that focused on establishing Parent Resource Centers was also built into the plan. Each school also differed a little from each other concerning the ages of children attending the program, the physical site that housed the program, and the kinds of activities in which children participated.

While schools had individual autonomy in determining their hours of operation, Centers, for the most part were open between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, everyday that school was in session. Built into the model was centralized coordination, administration, and supervision carried out by a program director with local control of specific optional activities at the individual school CLC level under the direction of site coordinators.

Table III provides contextual information about each program's attendance rate, hours of operation, when the programs began operation, and transportation information.

Table III – Site Information

School	Total Number Served	Avg Daily Attendance	Hrs of Operation	Starting Date	Transportation
Effingham	15	11	3:00-5:30	9/20/99	None
JCN	24	16	3:40-5:30/6:00	9/13/99	Bus return to Winchester
McLouth	26	20	3:15-5:30/6:00	9/27/99	Provided
Perry-Lecompton	31	25	3:20-5:30/6:00	10/25/99	Bus to and from Lecompton
Valley Falls	48	41	3:20-5:45/6:00	9/27/99	Provided

Evaluation Findings

The following summaries and discussions of the data are organized by the key questions focusing the evaluation. Based on the discussions, recommendations for program improvement are inserted throughout the evaluation report.

I. NEKCLC Program Benefits

Benefits of the program will be examined from the perspective of educational and social/behavioral changes observed in children.

A. Academic Benefits

In addition to collecting data from all stakeholders in the program, student grades were also used as an indicator in determining academic benefits.

(1) Teachers' perceptions. Teachers responded to two separate surveys over the course of the year – one in December or mid-year and one in May at the close of the first year. Of the 37 respondents in the mid-year evaluation, 62% or nearly 2/3 of the teachers reported the program as being academically

beneficial with responses varying from benefitting slightly to very effective. Teachers noted an increase in spelling skills, tests scores, and math. They indicated that it was obvious that the students were practicing phonics, spelling, and math facts. Typical comments included: test scores are improving, children are gaining more confidence, coming better prepared to class, completing assignments, and are more sure of themselves. Five noted that the after-school program did not seem to be making any difference academically with one commenting that the program seemed to be "more social than academic."

At the end of the year when teachers were asked if the after-school program was a worthwhile activity, 27/30 said yes with three indicating no. Concerning the academic impact the program had on students, the vast majority indicated that it had a positive academic impact. Typical comments included: both students mastered fluency for 2nd grade level – passed ORL's and most outcomes, I feel both students benefitted with extra practice in reading, homework was done and brought back, it enhanced reading comprehension, and those students who attended were able to complete what they did in CLC with high quality or positive results. There were some, however, who said that it did not have much of an impact, or gave statements such as, "while my students improved it is hard to tell if it was due to CLC."

Teachers often tied academic impact to the quality of the homework and the rate of homework completion. In the mid-year evaluation 18/37 (just less than 50%) responded positively about homework completion. Comments ranged from the quality is generally good and accurate to great quality and excellent. Ten commented neither positively nor negatively, stating such things as students don't have homework to complete, more one-on-one is needed and should be checked more closely. Five had negative comments about homework, stating that it continues to be rushed, the quality is poor, and not a great change.

Responses were rather similar in the final evaluation. Positive comments included such things as the homework was done neatly and in a timely manner, excellent, above average, or it increased the return of quality homework. But a large number of teachers, who seemed to think that the primary purpose of the CLC was to provide assistance with homework, shared their frustrations in comments such as that of one teacher who said, "For our students the academic instruction time to complete homework was at the very end of the CLC time. Many of our students were picked up early or were not very efficient at completing assignments." Another teacher who believed that the CLCs should focus more on homework stated, "Older students could have benefitted from more time for work completion. Too much enrichment at times."

(2) **Principals' perceptions.** All principals interviewed thought that their after-school program had significant academic benefits as well. One principal commented

> there is academic support particularly for kids who were at-risk that there wouldn't be any support at home. When we give the work here we know it gets done, even if it's just another 20 minutes of reading practice, you know it got done.

While one indicated that she had not "looked specifically at after-school students to see if they have increased their grades or their test scores on anything," she also said that none of the teachers had complained about some of the students attending the program, academically. As a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the academic benefits on the program, this principal said that she would like to see students' curriculum-based measurement (CBM) scores next year to see the academic progress that students were making. Another commented that "there is no way to measure it exactly," but then added that he felt what was being done in the CLC program was reinforcing state required outcomes. One principal believed that the direct instruction component should continue to be emphasized because any opportunity to help children become better readers was time well spent.

In general, however, comments that focused on the academics also led to discussions about homework with one indicating that some parents and teachers wanted more time spent on homework. Another regarded the academic portion of the program as providing those students who were in the 3rd, 4th, or 5th grades with homework assistance. This same principal voiced a concern about increasing student enrollment and how she believed that might be detrimental to the academic value of the program. In querying what the purpose of the after-school program was, one principal commented,

> I think some teachers viewed it as the homework warehouse, where they send their homework and it needs to be completed there and if not, then the program's not doing what it's supposed to do. And from what I've heard and what I perceive, that's not necessarily what the program was intended to do, it's not a place where homework is sent and necessarily is to be completed. I mean there are other things that are the focus of the program, such as exposure to the arts and crafts, and the curriculum that they were using. I mean there is more to it then just going over to a study hall, and I think some teachers view it that way.

(3) **Program/site coordinators' perceptions.** When asked their perceptions of the educational benefits of the program, four of the five site coordinators' responses were connected to homework activities, mentioning specifically that it provided the necessary time to give their children assistance in homework comtion. Other educational benefits included extra time for reading, direct instruction, or constant testing of basic math facts. One person shared that "the collaboration between staff and classroom teachers bridges the gap that may happen from school to home." One other site coordinator added an additional education benefit of exposing the children to good literature.

In reflecting on the educational benefits and the perceived relationship between academic achievement and the preponderance of homework, the program coordinator believed, for the most part, that the CLCs should include a strong homework component. She commented,

> I'm glad that since the kids have, in some places, an inordinate amount of homework that we are able to give it. I think it has been valued by the parents, it has been valued by the teachers, it has been – however, we spend so much time on it, for us....I don't like seeing a first grader with 30 minutes of homework and we have that in some schools.

She surmised,

> I wonder if they think they (the children) go to the after school program – they can get it done in that program so we'll pile it on...It has been a way that we have been able to develop some positive feedback from parents and teachers. I think the thing now is to re-educate them as to the value that's placed on it...They appreciate it because it gets done, and so they're ready to move on. Some resent it because they think we're taking the place of the parents' responsibility and I say, if they can go home and have some quality time at home instead of being stressed out and fussing over this homework, that they're not shirking their responsibility.

In further analyzing the homework situation she pondered if students might not be using their time wisely in the classroom and instead opting to do homework at the CLC since they know that they have that block of time anyway. She thought that one way to get around this might be to offer exciting learning opportunities at the CLC as an incentive for students to complete their homework in class rather than saving it for CLC time.

(4) Parents' perceptions. Parents also acknowledge that academic benefits are one of the major reasons they send their children to the after-school program and in the same manner as most others, attribute this to homework completion. In the mid-year evaluation the top three things parents indicated they liked about the program included help with homework (receiving 29/35 responses), the additional help their children were receiving in reading and math (28/35 responses), and a safe environment and the organized activities (each received 25/35 responses). When asked to select the most important reason for enrolling their child, they indicated the extra help their children receive in math and reading. Responses at the end of the year survey were similar with homework completion ranking number one (26/27 responses). The safe environment ranked second (receiving 24/27) and the provision of organized activities and additional help in reading and math each received 22 responses.

Parents do attribute homework completion as an academic benefit in the program – but it seems to be more so from the perspective that if children do their homework during the after-school program, then they don't have to "fight" with their children to get their homework done later that evening as one parent explained, "Mom is not as grouchy when (her child) comes home due to the fact that the 'homework fight' is resolved due to most work being completed after school!" Other comments included , "My child is very active and trying to do homework with him after school was quite the chore, but since the program started, he completes homework while in the program with no problem," or "She likes to get her homework done...We like that our evenings have been less stressful without homework too." It seems that parents feel a sense of relief in not having to contend with homework in the evening. One parent who realizes the value that teachers placed on homework completion commented that she felt that getting the homework done as important so that her son "didn't get into trouble." Another parent admitted that the staff in the after-school program were more capable of helping her child with homework, especially English homework as she had "a hard time remembering all the rules, too." Parents stated when their children completed their homework in the program that meant they had more time together in the evenings to do other types of activities.

Several parents indicated in their surveys that they believed the primary purpose should be on homework completion with one stating that they play a lot and "don't have time to do their homework." In fact, one parent commented that the reason she was pulling her children out of the program or not re-enrolling them was that she believed the children had too much free time and thought the program should have a stronger emphasis on schoolwork completion.

(5) Student grades. Student grades was another indicator used to determine the academic impact the program had on students. Grades were tracked in both math and reading. Table IV shows the number of students from each school and indicates whether their grades went up, down, or stayed the same.
An inherent problem in this data is that the basis for grades may be arbitrary (i.e., some may be using attendance and homework completion, some may be using unit or chapter tests, etc.) and the fact that grading procedures differ from school to school. While curriculum-based measurement (CBM) was used and children's CBM scores increased at both Valley Falls and JCN, the teachers' grades do not necessarily reflect this. CBM is a more effective measure of student progress in reading and math rather than teachers' arbitrary grading. State assessment data would also have been a more accurate measure, but was not available for this report. Another problem with these data is that it is difficult to isolate the treatment of the CLC from other treatments/strategies that these children encountered during the course of the year.

Discussion Regarding Academic Benefits

It is difficult to surmise the reason for the number of students whose grades decreased. The McLouth CLC had made a concerted effort to target children most academically in need and then

used daily timed math tests as an intervention strategy, and yet in looking at the results shown on the grades, McLouth shows the biggest number of students/per students enrolled having the most decline in math grades. One needs to question what difference does devoting this segment of time to math computation tests and basic facts make when students' scores in math dropped by a significant number? Except for Perry/Lecompton it appears that all other CLCs had appreciable amounts of student decreases in math, while the opposite seems to be true in reading. Better, and more reliable, documentation of students' academic progress is needed.

Table IV – Grade Data								
Site	**Math**	**Up**	**Down**	**Same**	**Reading**	**Up**	**Down**	**Same**
Effingham		2	4	4		2	3	5
JCN		3	5	7		6	2	7
McLouth		1	8	9		8	3	7
Perry-Lecompton		16	1	7		17	1	6
Valley Falls		10	7	20		13	4	21

Recommendations:

- Perhaps in future years more specific measures, such as CBM, might be used across all sites so that site coordinators and educators in schools will be able to make a more accurate determination of students' academic progress and growth.
- Perhaps the CLCs need to keep a separate accountability system that measures students' progress and growth rates that can be used in conjunction with the teacher's assessment of student progress.

There appears to be a paradox regarding homework. While many stakeholder groups had strong beliefs concerning how the priority should be placed on homework, yet the research indicates that homework doesn't seem to make an appreciable difference academically with elementary children.[12] Parents reported that they appreciated the fact that the CLC's focused on homework completion so that they would not have to "do battle" with their children over homework later in the evening and that they could then spend quality family time with their children. Or as one principal in relating why parents were so enthusiastic for the program shared, "They don't have to growl around at their kids when they get home about doing their homework, and parents are delighted about that one." She then added, "A list of feedback that I have gotten from my parents is they are so delighted that they don't have to spend it on the homework, instead they can do family things." Another principal made a similar comment in conceding that homework is a "huge struggle and it's kind of nice cause then when they come home they can just hang out the they don't have to have that pressure."

On the other hand, many teachers believed that the CLCs were enabling parents not to participate in their children's homework, with some believing that parent supervision of homework completion is the only legitimate kind of parent involvement. For instance, in a teacher focus group one teacher commented that she "felt like sometimes the parents tried to push too much of that (homework

completion) on to the school and just totally stepped back from that responsibility." Other comments made by teachers concerning this included, "Unfortunately, I think it releases more responsibility from the parents, as it's the school that's taking care of homework needs instead of at home." This person then added that many of those students need this support from school because of the possible lack of support at home. Another teacher said,"I feel like the parents have taken a backseat and now don't really bother to work with the kids as much." And yet another teacher, in her response to being asked how the after-school program impacts parent involvement queried, "Is it just a babysitting service? Parents feel that they don't need to spend time working with their child at home on academics?" Comments such as this last comment almost illustrate a sense of teacher animosity towards the after-school program.

Comments typical of this seem to indicate that teachers have a limited view of what constitutes parent involvement. The literature and research supports an active role by parents in students' achievement, but is often short-sighted in legitimating involvement as constituting other things than parents supervising homework completion. While about 30% of the teachers who were surveyed said they felt the CLC program impacted parent involvement in a positive way saying things such as, "I believe it would allow parents to spend time reading with their children or other activities – not spending all evening on work not completed during class time," 27% believed the program negatively impacted parent involvement. These teachers did not consider quality time spent with children doing things other than homework, as constituting parent involvement. On the other hand, they seemed to appreciate the fact that more children were completing homework. Homework completion, it seems, is one of the major determinants for student grades along with attendance.

The site coordinators and staff reported that homework completion seemed to contribute in a positive way to students' sense of self-esteem – the more that homework was completed, the more respect these children seemed to have from their teachers leading to an increased sense of self-esteem on the part of the students.

Recommendations:

- Perhaps larger discussions are required among day school staff that address the value and place of homework in the larger scheme of things (i.e., student understanding and other ways to demonstrate understanding other than homework completion). And perhaps discussions are needed in schools to expand teachers' perceptions of what constitutes parent involvement.

- Perhaps discussions with day school staff should also address alternative ways for teachers to demonstrate that they value all students beyond completion of homework or that address the findings of a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of instructional strategies which places a premium on attending to the affective domain.[13]

Consistent with the experience of the CLCs and the homework dilemma, teachers in national surveys have reported the following reasons for assigning homework:

(1) Homework teaches self-discipline. Eighty-eight percent of teachers and principals in one study agreed that homework "develops children's initiative and responsibility".[14]
(2) Homework is believed to increase student achievement.
(3) Homework fulfills the expectation of students, parents, and the public. Teachers favor the

practice by 95 percent, according to a 1992 Gallup Poll.[15]

(4) Homework increases the length of the school day without increasing the number of hours actually spent in school.

(5) Homework provides an avenue of communication between the school and the parents.

Contrary to the importance placed on homework completion by adults as constituting a critical component of the CLC program, through observations and in querying the children, the homework component was clearly disengaging for the children, with some reporting that it was boring and others displaying little or no motivation. Through direct observations, it was noted that most of the homework assigned to students to complete in the after-school program generally consisted of mindless, meaningless, busywork that often consisted of worksheet upon worksheet of math problems, lists of spelling words to write and rewrite, and simple question/answer sheet type of assignments. For the most part the homework that was assigned was consistent with a "transmission" model of education, or to use Paulo Freire's (a famous Brazilian educator whose life work focused on ways to assist students in the production rather than reproduction of knowledge), terminology, a "banking process" of education where data deposits are made into the inactive mental vaults of students' brains.[16] The problem with this type of educational process is that it zaps teachers and students, alike, of the potential for a meaningful, exciting learning experience.

Research has shown that homework at the elementary level does not impact students' achievement in school.[17] Other research shows that when the work of school is about atomizing education or breaking down learning into minute subskills that there is not a long term impact. In reading programs where the focus is primarily on teaching the subskills with homework that primarily consists of worksheets or dittos focused on the subskills, students often learn isolated subskills but these same students generally are not reading for knowledge, enjoyment, or meaning. Reading programs of this nature often commit a fatal error in assuming that the parts add up to the whole.[18] The same is true for mathematics programs that focus primarily on computation skills and are dependent on children memorizing algorithms. These programs don't enable students to develop math power or number sense, the focus of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Given this, a paradox exists. Teachers in the sending NEKCLC schools seem to believe that homework completion contributes to student achievement. Yet, from observations in these programs the majority of the homework assigned is not consistent with the type of skill development required of students to perform on the state assessments. While the state assessments are requiring that students engage in ill-structured problem-solving, simplistic word lists and math worksheets, typical of the assigned homework, instead requires students to find the "right" answer. Students are not being asked to engage in the higher order thinking skills that ill-structured problems on the state assessments currently require. Teachers in the day program, themselves, need assistance in understanding the nature of ill-structured problems, ways to structure teaching and homework to facilitate students' ability to do ill-structured problem-solving. But as one principal said,

That's like changing the whole paradigm of teaching, you know. Getting it more hands-on and I know even when I go into the classrooms I think I have some really good teachers, but I've had some teachers I'm kind of concerned about because it's like – OK, we are going to do page 28 and 1 through 32."

Recommendation:

- If one of the goals of the after-school programs is to enable students to achieve at a higher rate on the state assessments, then perhaps time spent in the program should focus more so on project-based, experiential and hands-on learning where students can be confronted with ill-structured problems and challenged to think and apply learning in meaningful contexts.

While it seems that there are unquestioned assumptions being made about the value of homework in these schools, the reality is that a large segment of time is being spent in the CLC program devoted to homework completion. Seligson, the founder of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, cautions against the overt emphasis on academic skills, which she says, "can easily slip into worksheets and drill if one does not understand that recreation can be educational." She then adds that "we need to be careful about the trend toward seeing after-school programs as 'homework only' centers, especially given the current emphasis on high stakes testing."[19]

As observed in all these after-school programs, the homework that students were doing failed to spark students' interests and natural curiosity about learning. If the goal of learning is, as Dewey contends, to connect or "mesh" with students' interests, we need to ask, how are the after-school programs enabling this to happen? How does homework spark children's interest and extend their intellect? If one of the goals of the after-school program is to raise student achievement, how do staff in the after-school programs justify the large block of time being required to attend to the mundane? And finally, where after-school programs have found ways to excite students about learning and enable them to practice ill-structured problem-solving (through project-based and experiential learning opportunities), how can teachers in the day school program learn and benefit from the experience of the after-school program? Regarding the homework dilemma, the program coordinator suggested that perhaps during the course of the next year site coordinators could try to "look at the quality of what the kids are doing, and what they're giving up in order to do that."

B. Social and Behavioral Benefits

Because children's behavioral changes were often determined by how well they interacted in social settings with other children, these benefits will be examined together. The program was structured in such a manner so as to provide children with ample opportunities to engage in formal and informal activities that assisted the development and reinforcement of social and behavioral skills. All programs included a recreational component for children to play together in informal settings. All programs also had a designated time slot that focused on building healthy relationships. With support from the Kansas Health Foundation, the NEKCLC received curriculum materials/supplies and technical assistance from Foundations, Inc., of Philadelphia, PA. These materials provided excellent discussion starters to address behavioral and social development skills. The nature of the program at most sites, where children were mixed across age- and grade-levels, also provided opportunities for them to interact with each other and practice these skills.

Parents, principals, and site coordinators overwhelmingly believed that the after-school program positively impacted children's social and behavior skills. Two of the five principals interviewed, believed that meeting the social/behavioral needs of the children was the greatest benefit of the program. While not perceived as the most important benefit of the program, nearly 50% of the parents at mid-year indicated that they appreciated the fact that the program provided opportunities for their children to play and interact with other children. At the end of the year 66% of the parents responded likewise. Parents indicated that their children enjoyed the time spent with other children in the program and the interactions they had with their

friends and the opportunity to make new friends. Several noted that this interaction had positive effects on their children's sense of self-esteem. Several others commented that they appreciated the opportunity for their children to have social contact with older volunteers in the program.

Being with the children nearly 100% of the time, the site coordinators were able to observe many social and behavioral changes in the students. A theme that emerged from their comments was that the after-school program engendered a feeling or sense of "family" among the children and the adults/youth assistants in the program. They indicated that the children learned how to play and interact with each other, developed teamwork skills, and a genuine respect for each other. Concerning specific behavioral changes or skills development, comments from Site Coordinators included that the children were more aware of others' feelings, displayed manners (i.e., while eating snacks, opening doors for others), the level of tattling decreased and children became more helpful and considerate of each other. One site coordinator commented that the program enabled her children to develop anger management skills, to make good choices, to develop a sense of humor, and to take responsibility for their actions.

Teachers had mixed responses concerning the social and behavioral benefits. At mid-year only 43% of the teachers responding believed there were positive changes in students' behavior/social skills. Two teachers commented that they believed the program was creating negative behavior in students or feelings of frustration. Of the 27 teachers participating in the end-of-the-year review, 13 had positive comments while only three responded negatively. Affirmative comments included things such as, "caring, kindness, respect, and self control are practiced at CLC" and "very good socialization going on – I have witnessed it myself." In a teacher focus group when asked about the social/behavior benefits, one explained

> I mean that they had a lot of opportunities to use their social skills, a lot of manner opportunities with having the snack and that kind of thing, too. But also, they were in a multi-grade and so that gave them the opportunity to socialize with older students.

While one of the principals had indicated a concern with all ages of children being mixed together, most other stakeholders believed this "family like" atmosphere was a major benefit of the CLC program.

Discussion Regarding Social and Behavioral Benefits

While this structured or unstructured play time was subsumed under the "expanding children's horizons" component in providing children with recreational opportunities, it was quite obvious that play time also was quality time for children to experience educational learning experiences as well and to develop their motor skills, cooperation, sportsmanship, and healthy relationships as well. What was so amazing was how students interacted across age and grade levels – you would see the oldest students taking time to play with the younger ones and including everyone in the process. This seemed to contribute to other positive interactions the children had during other activities in the program. One parent commented to me, that this interaction carried itself into the school day and that her son, whom she felt had a lower self-esteem, commented that even during the day at school, older students involved in CLC would tell him "hello" when they passed in the hall. This little act alone, impacted her son's self-esteem in a very positive way. So the interaction that occurred on the playground carried itself into other aspects of the school and it created a feeling of "family" among and between students in the program.

It was also interesting that students often referred to this time as "recess," referring to traditional language used in the day school program. So often in schools, the physical recreation time can be

devastating for children, especially those that do not find themselves as physically agile as other students (in getting picked last or in not wanting to participate because of lack of skills). But it was quite obvious that this feeling did not pervade the CLCs – children cooperated and played together quite well. For the most part, staff willingly participated in these activities as well and often seemed to use this time as an opportunity to connect with children in meaningful ways.

C. Youth/Community Enrichment Activities & Safety Concerns

Providing a safe environment was a high priority for all stakeholders. In the final evaluation, 89% of the parents responded that they were appreciative that the after-school program had provided a safe environment for their children. Four of the five site coordinators listed this as the greatest benefit to children's involvement in the program with comments such as "allows children a safe place to go with a variety of activities." Principals felt the same way with one believing that the greatest value of the program was "having a safe place for kids to be after school." Another indicated that the only other alternative for some of the kids would be "running around town," so he felt the program certainly addressed a need of providing a "safe place for kids to spend two and a half hours." Many of the teachers and the regional Advisory Council also believed that provision of a safe after school environment was a major goal of the program.

All of the CLC's were exemplary in the provision of a variety of recreational and cultural enrichment activities for children in conjunction with the routine program. While some of the activities included things like racing scooters in the gymnasium, checkers tournaments, and project-based activities involving puppets, arts and crafts, and technology, others involved activities with participation from outside organizations. Abilities awareness equipment and materials were provided by the Capper Foundation so students could experience life with various disabilities. Independence Inc. followed up with a speaker's panel visit to each of the sites so children could interact with people with disabilities. While students were not involved in the needs assessment or planning stages of service-learning projects, to varying degrees most of the CLCs participated in community-based service activities. These included involving the children in intergenerational contact. Children visited nursing homes, assisted living residents and read to the residents, made cards, tray favors and door decorations for the senior citizens with whom they interacted. Another site was involved in outdoor clean-up activities to commemorate Earth Day. At one site the students performed Christmas songs in English, Spanish, and German for the community's Rotary Club. At another site the children prepared a Christmas dinner for their parents and then entertained them with song and poetry. With one of the teacher assistants having a baby during the school year, the children at that site sponsored a "baby shower." This same teacher assistant, a professional opera singer, performed an opera for the children, who in turn, decorated the facility and made the refreshments.

In a needs assessment, parents were asked to indicate the types of resources/services and training they felt would be beneficial to them. Fifty percent of those responding indicated that they would like parenting ideas about how to help their children become better students. Over 30% shared that they would like information on parenting skills such as discipline and behavior management, basic training in technology and computer applications, and aerobics or fitness classes. In response to meeting these needs, the CLCs co-sponsored a parent enrichment activity on "Parenting with Love and Logic." Over 100 parents attended these three-session parenting training classes that happened in three separate locations in the region. To facilitate parent involvement, meals were served and babysitting services provided.

D. Student Resilience and the Needs of At-Risk Students

One of the project's goals was to target at-risk students and the Advisory Council spent time during some

of their initial meetings discussing how this might happen. While the Council suggested that students labeled "at-risk" be given a percentage of the available slots, local sites were given discretion on how to handle this. Several teachers when interviewed, shared their concern that children who seemed to need it most, were not involved and even though they had encouraged several parents to send their children, these parents had decided against it. One principal said that some of her students who needed the program most, were not participating and indicated that they ended up not targeting the at-risk students because they thought it might appear like a discriminatory practice. At another site, the coordinator indicated that their enrollment was 99% at-risk students who had been specifically targeted based on test score data.

During staff training, the site coordinators were made aware of the resiliency model, based on social development theory, that was the basis for program design of the NEKCLC.[20] All activities were purposeful and thoughtfully planned and implemented at each site as a way to foster resilience in children. While a formal component of the program was to "build healthy relationships, the reality, according to the project coordinator, was that "everything that happened in the program was building healthy relationships" which fostered a sense of resilience in students. She went on to say that she believed the greatest benefits of the entire program was the development of relationships between staff and the children. She explained

> I think that we are there for the kids and I think that's the greatest benefit. Because, yes, we're supposed to be helping kids meet state standards, etc., but we are the only place where there's an opportunity to relate to kids without a curriculum hanging over our heads. So instead of taking kids through curriculum, you can try to get curriculum to go through the kids. And our curriculum, in terms of healthy relationships and all of those kinds of things, I just think we have a special opportunity to meet the kids where they are, and test them, listen to them and value them.

In examining the many opportunities the CLCs provided to children to foster protective factors, one of the major contributors was the development of supportive relationships between the children and the staff – i.e., the site coordinators, other adult staff, high school assistants, and community volunteers. While several of the sites had either none or two or less adult volunteers, one site had several volunteers that participated on a regular basis. Site coordinators believed that one of the greatest benefits of the program for children was how it created "a sense of family and belonging." In observing each of the CLC programs, this was an obvious outcome. Site coordinators and their staff were attentive to children's needs throughout the two and half to three hours that children were there; disciplined them, when necessary, in a manner that afforded children a sense of dignity and justice; incorporated fun and humor into their programs; and did whatever they deemed necessary to build students' sense of self-esteem. Children participated in numerous opportunities to explore their environment through all the activities – academic, social, and recreational – that the CLCs provided (see Part C – Youth/Community Enrichment Activities & Safety Concerns).

Seven high school students were involved in the various CLC programs this past year as either volunteers or paid student assistants. When asked to, comment on the value of that experience one youth assistant responded, "I am satisfied with the experience because it allows me to work with children and share some things I have learned in past experiences with them." The children participating in the program, likewise commented that they enjoyed having youth assistants there to help them. Several of the principals indicated that they would like to see more mentors involved in the program for the purpose of developing relationships, with one suggesting middle school, high school, or college student involvement. Another principal encouraged the continued practice of involving high school students as mentors in the programs because while it had only happened a couple of times during the year (in their particular program), she thought this would be an excellent thing to continue because, "The children need those role models, " adding "It's

always kind of gratifying to have those little kids look up to them."

Concerning the self-efficacy variable, 43% of the parents surveyed (mid-year) indicated that their children saw themselves as more successful in the classroom. Several also indicated that because children were working on and completing homework in the program, this contributed to less family stress and better quality family time in the evenings. One principal commented that she believed the greatest value of the program was the "self-confidence, the self-esteem the children have gotten from this." At the mid-year evaluation, 65% of the teachers reported positive impacts on students' self-concept or feeling of success. Several commented that their students were excited to show off what they've done and that they feel better about themselves because they are caught up on their work or come better prepared for school. One said, "when work is completed, there is definitely a notable behavior displaying their pride in completing their work." Another commented that the CLC has "made a huge impact on my students' self-concept." Teachers' responses at the end of the year were overwhelmingly positive concerning the program's impact on students' level of self-esteem and confidence. There were several who either disagreed or had no opinion. One said the after-school program wasn't "detrimental" and another commented, "Hard to tell if their improved self-concept is due to after-school program or my own teaching."

Discussion Regarding Student Resilience

School children are faced with countless risks that threaten their personal, social, and academic well-being. In spite of these, many children are able to demonstrate remarkable resilience, and are able to succeed. Many researchers, including McMillan and Reed[21] and Werner[22] discuss the many protective factors that foster resiliency. The challenge for schools is to maximize these protective factors as they design and implement programs that foster resiliency in children. Table V lists many of these factors. An analysis of the NEKCLC programs reveals that of the 28 protective factors listed, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that at least 17 of these factors (those with the asterisk) were met on a routine basis in all of the after-school programs.

Table V – Protective Factors That Promote Resiliency

*Admiration and supportive relationships with at least one adult	Good health	*Sense of community belonging
*Belief that goals are achievable	*Low family stress	*Sense of dignity
Caring parents	*Opportunities to explore one's environment	*Sense of humor
Clear long-term goals	Perceptions that dysfunctional home environments do not hin der academic success	*Sense of justice
College preparatory plans	*Personal responsibility	Spiritual belonging
Enhanced opportunities at major life transitions	*Presence of supportive adults	*Sports participation
Feelings of personal control over one's life	*Schools that emphasize involvement and belonging	*Supportive school personnel
Having experienced lessons ("reality checks") that reverse the allure of risk behaviors	*Self-efficacy (in various domains)	*Unconditional love
	*Self-esteem	*Using time positively and productively
		Virtue
		Well-developed maturity
		Optimism about one's future
		*Met by the CLC

E. Fidelity to the Program Model and Criteria for Quality Programs

One of the primary questions of the evaluation was to what degree the CLCs implemented the design of the model as it was conceptualized in the proposal. In addition to assessing fidelity, it was also important to

determine the site coordinators' opinions regarding the value these components had in the overall design of the after-school programs. Respondents were given a survey with a Likert scale of 1-5, with a one rating indicating either no implementation and not valuable, a three meaning the component was somewhat being implemented and perceived as having neutral value to the program, and a five meaning complete implementation and extremely valuable and a necessary component of after-school programs. Table VI shows the mean value assigned to each component (One of the sites inadvertently left one page blank).

Table VI – Mean Scores Concerning Fidelity to the Model

Component	IMPL Rating	Comments	VALUE Rating	Comments
Component 1: Strengthening academic skills				
Direct instruction	2.6	This was reported as no use, to sporadic use, to consistent use w/certain children.	3.4	One reported that this seemed like "overkill"; another was "not sure how many would benefit;" another said she was not adequately trained; and one indicated it worked well.
Learning strategies and study skills	3.4	While one said it was never thoroughly explained, others indicated using various strategies and study skills through games, computers, etc.	4.75	All reported that they wanted to teach more study skills.
Peer/cross-age tutoring	4	All reported they used this to a certain extent and that children enjoyed it. Where it wasn't used as readily was where the children were academically poor readers or where the kids bullied others.	4.6	They all indicated that it was extremely important, except one who gave it a 3 rating.
Service-learning	3.2	Most CLCs engaged in a variety of community-service activities, but not necessarily service-learning.	4.4	They all reported this as valuable and said it was necessary for children to be a part of, and feel responsibility toward the community.
Hands-on, experiential, project/based learning	4.6	CLCs reported many opportunities and activities used – experiments, inventions, crafts, play writing, creative movement, built an obstacle course, etc.	4.8	One said, "Students don't want to sit and do seat work another 1½ hours during CLC." Others highly endorsed this type of learning with one commenting that, "Quiet learning was not in our vocabulary."
Access to school libraries	4.4	Effingham reported no access – they used the public library one day/week; Perry/Lecompton felt they had restricted use).	4.4	

Homework assistance	5	While all devoted a large time block to homework, McLouth spent up to an hour/day.	5	This was rated a 5 by all coordinators with comments such as "95% of my students were there for the academics," "parents and children appeared to appreciate the work being completed," and "it is important to follow through the classroom teacher's requests to have a successful collaboration with staff."
Community/ VISTA volunteer reading assistance	2.6	One CLC had numerous volunteers providing assistance, another had four HS students, the others reported they needed to work on this component.	4.4	All valued this as a 5 but one that gave it a 2 rating commented, "I need to do a lot more next year."
Component 2: Building healthy relationships				
Integrated health/social serv prog to foster resilience	3.5	Coordinators reported guest speakers– presented info on tobacco use, alcohol, and drugs; Abilities Awareness activities.	4.75	All believed that this was an extremely important component and that "the earlier we can reach kids on these topics the better."
Opportunities for children to address or solve problems and increase sense of self-esteem	3.75	All reported many ways of teaching problem-solving skills by pulling a problem out of a jar and solving it on the spot; drama and puppets; teamwork; daily socializing, and teaching anger management techniques	5	All rated this as a 5 with comments such as it is important to develop a positive self-concept and for all to have a need for self-worth
Component 3: Widening children's horizons				
Provision of recreational activities	4.75	Many opportunities were provided–structured/ unstructured time outside, organized games, "snowball fights" with newspapers, dancing, strategy games, and an obstacle course.	5	All gave this a 5 saying that this teaches coordination, social skills, sharing, strategy, and the ability to play and get along with a variety of age groups. One commented that "after we play and laugh the children are ready to study." And another said "it helped so much in developing healthy relationships."
Provision of cultural activities	3.75	One site reported a 5, while the others 2s and a 4, indicating that while some activities occurred there was a need for more. Some invited in speakers while others used literature.	5	All reported the value as a 5 saying it is critical for children to be aware of all cultures, especially where there is little diversity.
Provision of enrichment activities (music/foreign language, etc.)	3.25	All indicated that they incorporated music and/or dance; two offered minimal foreign language in Spanish and French.	4.75	They believed that enhancing the curriculum was important in sustaining student interest.

Provision of technology-related activities	3.4	Three reported using or having access to computers daily. One said, "Not this year." Another said that while they had computers, the technology was old and outdated.	4.2	They felt the value of technology was exposing students to a variety of learning tools.
Involvement in community-based youth organizations (i.e., Boy/Girl Scouts, etc.)	2.2	While one rated this a 5 having several of her students participate in sports and youth organizations, 3 rated this as 1and one a 3.	3.8	They all, except one, indicated it was important saying that it would be neat to have different organizations working with the CLCs to broaden concepts and ideas, or to work on large, special projects.
Component 4: Establishing Parent Resource Centers				
Parents participate in or volunteer in children's activities	2.6	This was rated rather low with coordinators saying that they had few or no parents who volunteered in the program.	4	While they all felt it would be helpful to have parents, some questioned how realistic that is with working parents.
Parenting knowledge/skill development	2.8	Rated rather low again, one of the only activities was Love & Logic training for parents, of which not too many CLC parents attended.	4.4	Three of the four indicated that it was important to offer training for parents in more/better parenting skills.
Technology skills training	1	All reported that this was not implemented.	4	Four felt that this was something that should be offered in the future.

Six of the 18 components identified as important for after-school programs received less than a three rating, meaning that they were somewhere on the scale between not implemented and somewhat implemented. Of these six items, only two were rated as less than a four concerning the value of the component – with direct instruction receiving ratings of 2.6 and 3.4 and involvement in community-based youth organizations receiving a 2.2 and 3.8. The lowest value for any one item was given to direct instruction, indicating mixed feelings about including direct instruction as part of the program model. The program coordinator indicated that direct instruction was the "biggest problem in terms of getting it implemented." She went on to say that she believed things would be different the next year with the training her staff was receiving and the thinking that direct instruction techniques could be incorporated "at any given moment, teachable moment" to direct students' attention to the lesson being taught.

Commenting on the service-learning component that received ratings of 3.2 and 4.4, the program coordinator commented that it had been minimally implemented this year and that it really had entailed community service rather than service-learning. But she also commented that steps were being taken to introduce staff to broader perspectives on service-learning – how it could be used to reinforce learning, how the children should be involved in determining the learning needs and the planning of the activities. She added,

> The thing that I think is very valuable, if first the kids are involved in planning. If you're just going through the motions of community service, that serves one purpose. It doesn't let you capitalize on the way that it takes them through the problem solving and the planning and the organizing. To me, that's where the learning comes from.

The only program component that received a five for both implementation and value was homework assistance, indicating that the CLCs were devoting sufficient to considerable time for homework completion and site coordinators believing that it was an important and necessary component. At one of the CLCs up to one hour was being devoted to homework completion.

In responses to questions concerning the implementation of the Parent Resource Center component, which received the lowest rating overall regarding implementation, the program coordinator indicated that while they had a long way to go they had made "an excellent start with Love and Logic" training. She said that for the next year she had purchased resources on parenting skills so that each site has the same collection of materials and resources. She also related that dates were already set for the following year to do more training in "Love and Logic." Concerning the provision of technology skills training, she indicated that she planned to contact agencies in the region who provide such training and use the CLC as an opportunity to make parents aware of these learning opportunities.

In examining the data, generated from the site coordinators' survey, from another perspective – looking at the variance between the ideal (the value placed on the components) and the reality (the degree of implementation) – there is significant variation (a difference of at least 3 or 4 points) with eight components at several of the sites. Table VII summarizes where this variance is occurring and indicates possibly more time needed to work with staff, or an examination of strategies that could be used concerning implementation of these components.

Table VII – Variance Scores

Component	Site	Variance Differential
Direct instruction	Valley Falls	4
Community/VISTA volunteer reading assistance	McLouth Perry/Lecompton	4 3
Provision of cultural activities	McLouth JCN	3 3
Provision of enrichment activities	McLouth	3
Involvement in community-based youth organizations	McLouth Valley Falls	4 3
Parents participate/volunteer in children's activities	Effingham	3
Opportunities for parenting knowledge/skill development	Perry/Lecompton	3
Opportunities to receive technology skills training	McLouth Valley Falls JCN Perry/Lecompton	4 4 4 3

Discussion Regarding Program Fidelity

Examining the fidelity of the implemented program to the conceptualized program is one way to assess the correspondence of the program as documented to the program as delivered. It is also an

important way to maintain quality control in the program. But the challenge, as in the case of these programs, is how to maintain program standardization while also maintaining a degree of flexibility and autonomy, given the fact that each program resided in a different school district, each with their own goals. Yet if one hopes to attain the desired and expected outcomes, then program fidelity is important. One way to assure fidelity while respecting the need for adaptability is to identify "core" components that single out the parts of the program that cannot change if the desired outcomes are to be achieved. This is why this evaluator believed it was important to not only assess the degree of implementation, but to understand how site coordinators valued these various program components, as the values one holds about these certainly impacts the implementation.

In examining the data presented in this section it is clear, that during the first year of the NEKCLC after-school programs, there has been a relatively high degree of fidelity to the model. While not all components have been implemented to the same degree as others, an attempt is being made to move in that direction. Looking at the process of implementation has provided keen insights into the kinds of professional development that are required to carry out the program developer's intent. Such is the case with direct instruction – plans have been made to provide further training to site coordinators to give them strategies and alternative ways to incorporate direct instruction into the daily program. With other less implemented components, such as the Parent Resource Centers, plans are in the making to bring this component up to par as well.

Recommendation:

- Perhaps an element in future professional development focused on implementation of program components, time might be spent examining perceived values of these components as a starting point to understanding where and why resistance to implementation might occur.

F. Comparison to Quality Criteria

The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA), a professional membership organization of school-age providers, trainers, and advocates, has established program standards for quality school-age child care that describe best practices. The standards are organized into six categories: human relationships, indoor environment, outdoor environment, activities, safety/health/nutrition, and administration. Approximately one third of the standards fall under human relationships. The standards use a four point Likert scale with one meaning no evidence to support this, two is happening to a limited degree, three means happening quite regularly, and four is occurring all the time. As a way to analyze observation data, all sites were evaluated against these standards. The 16 standards that comprise administration were used as a basis to organize the site coordinators' survey and the program coordinator interview. Table VIII presents a summary of the evaluator's impressions of the NEKCLC after-school programs judged against the NSACA standards in five of the six categories.

It is important to note that some of the standards ask questions about events that were not observable during any of the observations, such as Standard 6 (d) – When problems occur, children often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution. Conflicts rarely occurred at any of the CLC sites during observations. While several of the activities asked for in the standards may not have occurred during those three visits, this is not to say that these activities never occurred.

Table VIII – Comparison of NEKCLC's to NSACA Standards						
Standards	**Items/ Total Points**	**Effingham**	**JCN**	**McLouth**	**Perry/ Lecompton**	**Valley Falls**
Human Relationships	30/120	92/100–92%	94/100–94%	92/108–85%	69/104–66%	95/100—95%
Indoor Environment	8/32	13/32–41%	26/32–81%	29/32–90%	23/28–82%	29/32–91%
Outdoor Environment	4/16	16/16–100%	16/16–100%	14/16–88%	14/16–88%	16/16–100%
Activities	12/48	42/44–99%	43/44–98%	36/44–82%	34/44–77%	44/44–100%
Safety, Health & Nutrition	20/80	58/60–97%	60/60–100%	62/64–97%	54/56–96%	64/64–100%

In explaining the above ratings, the second column lists the number of items and the number of total points possible, so if there are 30 items and the top rating is four points, then the number of possible points for that particular category of standards would be 120. Under the program site columns is listed the total number of points from the ratings given during the observations as compared to the items that were rated. Consequently, under column three in the standards category human relationships, 25 of 30 sub-standards were observed in this category at the Effingham site. The total points possible were 100 and Effingham received 92 or 92% in this particular category. Under the human relationships category, McLouth received 92 out of a possible 108 points or achieved an 85% rating overall for this category; the Perry/Lecompton site was rated at 69/104 or a 66% rating in this category.

Discussion Concerning Quality Criteria Comparisons

An analysis of these ratings indicate that some of the CLC's rated higher in several of the standards categories than the others. For instance, the Perry-Lecompton CLC rated the lowest in the human relationships category which includes sub-standards that address how well staff and children interact in all activities and staff interactions among themselves. Observations of this site confirm these lower ratings – use of an inexperienced high school student teaching assistant with the youngest and most needy group concerning literacy development; the lack of interaction between staff and children during the recreational component; separating children into grade-specific classrooms where no interaction among and between children occurred as did at the other sites; and the site coordinator's communication style with her staff using a walkie-talkie.

Effingham rated considerably lower on the indoor environment standard. This is not an indictment of the program at Effingham, which received high ratings in all other categories, but rather shows the limitation of the space provided for the CLC program. The average rating for all CLC programs across all standards areas was 90% which is a high rating. The average rating of individual categories of the standards across all standards areas was 89%, another high rating – but with room for improvement.

The final set of standards NSACA covers Administration Standards and includes 16 separate indicators that are briefly summarized below:

1. **Staff/child ratios sufficient to meet needs of children.** The number of children participating in the program varied from site to site. Effingham had the fewest number of children with 11 regu-

larly attending and Valley Falls had the greatest number with up to 41 attendees. In addition to paid staff, Valley Falls also had access to several volunteers who helped maintain the teacher/student ratio within a reasonable (and acceptable) amount. The Executive Director of the agency overseeing this project has expressed concerns about the low number of attendees and has encouraged the project director to work with her staff in more intensive recruitment procedures.

Recommendation:

- Perhaps the Advisory Council could assist in a PR campaign to ensure higher number of children participating in future years.

2. **Children supervised at all times.** Children were more than adequately supervised at all times in all programs. It was unanimous among all stakeholder groups that the CLCs provided a place "with supervised care and structure."

3. **Support for family involvement.** While the formation of Parent Resource Centers were written into the program design with the intent to foster parent involvement, the CLCs fell short of meeting this goal. While a "Love & Logic" parenting course was offered that was extremely well attended by parents throughout the region, not as many CLC parents availed themselves of this opportunity as had been hoped. On the other hand, the CLCs were quite effective at supporting parent involvement from the perspective of homework completion – parents reported feelings of relief in not having to fight with their children over homework and believing it freed up time to engage in quality family activities.

Recommendation:

- Perhaps a more concerted effort should be made to look for alternative ways to actively involve parents. One principal suggested that a series of focus groups be held with parents on topics of concern. Parents also suggested other types of courses on parenting skills. Another suggestion is to consider how the CLCs can broker information to parents about educational opportunities in the region.

4. **Staff, families, and schools communicate with each other.** Communication between the day school and after-school programs for most sites was quite adequate with 28/37 teachers rating communication as either a four or five (5=extremely good) at the mid-year evaluation and 18/27 rating it as a four or five at the end of the year. But overall satisfaction with communication declined ten percent by the end of the year, with seven teachers rating it as either a two or three (1= communication not good at all). One of the principals, whose children were bused from their school to another elementary school to attend their CLC program, indicated that communication was the biggest problem they had encountered. He indicated that while measures had been put into place to facilitate the situation, these efforts had been abandoned by the end of the year.

Various means were used to communicate (i.e., verbal, notes, in person, visits, etc.) with a homework tracker/folder that was passed between the teacher and the site coordinator as the most prevalent method. Eleven teachers reported communicating with their site coordinator on a weekly basis and 15 communicating every other week, very seldom, or only when necessary. One teacher suggested that site coordinators try e-mailing as a more effective way to facilitate communication.

5. **Program builds links to community.** Linkages to the community were established in several ways – in visiting community-based organizations and facilities, performances for community groups, involvement in clean-up projects that lent visibility in the community, and through the involvement of community volunteers. At the present time, no linkages were happening with other community-based youth organizations, i.e., Girl and Boy Scouts or 4H, yet attendance in the after-school programs dropped off in the spring with students joining structured sports teams. One site coordinator suggested that they meet with these groups to collaborate on how they could both meet students' needs.

   Recommendation:

   - Perhaps in future years the Advisory Committee might work with the site coordinators, the program coordinator, and site principals to generate other ideas to create tighter community linkages.

6. **Indoor space meets needs of staff.** Storage space seemed to be an ongoing concern for most site coordinators. The Effingham site had extremely limited space for implementing a quality program. Things eased up a little once teachers began to allow their rooms to be used for the academic component in the program. The site coordinator and principal at Perry/Lecompton both mentioned space issues, even though the program occupied numerous classrooms, the cafeteria, and occasionally the school library.

7. **Outdoor space is sufficient.** All programs had more than adequate space for outdoor activities, being able to have the children use the playground and the equipment from the regular school program.

8. **Staff and children plan activities together.** While children were actively involved in a variety of activities, there was no evidence, of which the evaluator is aware of joint planning between staff and children, other than several of the activities at various sites, such as the decorations for the opera at Valley Falls. If service-learning takes on a more prominent role in the CLC program, the potential for involving students in decisions about the program and activities has much more potential. Subsumed under this standard are "activities that reflect the culture of the families in the program and the broad diversity of human experience." Through the Capper Foundation, children's consciousness was raised concerning disability. Students had opportunities to learn about disabilities and interact with persons who had disabilities. Several of the CLCs exposed their students to other cultures – but this was not common across all program sites.

9. **Polices and procedures concerning safety needs.** Procedures were in place at all CLCs to handle safety issues. Each program has a check-out system in place to prevent unauthorized people from picking up children at the end of the day. Those programs that transport children have established policies to transport them safely that complies with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.

10. **Policies and procedures to enhance health.** Similarly, policies and procedures were formulated that addressed these issues. All staff were trained to respond to accidents and emergencies.

11. **Staff professionally qualified.** The program coordinator was an extremely qualified educator having had 23 years experience working in Title I programs and having coordinated her district program. While coordinating a program of this magnitude was a new experience for her, she rose

to the challenge and was extremely well-received by five of the six principals involved in the program. In reflecting on the project coordinator's effectiveness in managing the program, one principal commented, "I feel that it has good leadership." Another principal responded that while the project coordinator must have been initially overwhelmed, she said, "I really think she has done an exceptional job." She then added,

> She communicates with me frequently. She must work 80 hours a week. You know she really gets out to the sites, she actually did some of the CBM testing herself.

Qualified staff were hired for each program. While all were not certified teachers, i.e., one having a social work background and another having teaching experience in a religious setting, all rose to the challenge and implemented programs that ranged from fairly successful to extremely successful.

12. **All staff provided with training.** Prior to the program beginning and intermittently throughout the year, staff had opportunities to participate in various professional development opportunities. Four of the five site coordinators believed that the training was adequate and made comments such as, "Training has been sufficient, but I would like more hands-on type training for learning strategies using experiments, crafts, etc.," and "I don't think any amount of training would have totally prepared us for the first year but I do feel we had opportunities to learn and prepare." One site coordinator indicated that she would have liked more background information on building resiliency in children. Another remarked that the training was so compact, "that it left some (like me) in a fog." She went on to say that the training was good, but she would have preferred "more time to process and put into action what is learned before new material is presented."

13. **Training needs of staff assessed and training is relevant to job.** Because the goal of training was to provide staff with sufficient background knowledge and information in implementing the NEKCLC program design, there was not a lot of room and time to provide training in other areas outside of the model. But on the other hand, all training was relevant to site coordinators being able to implement the model at their schools. The evaluator is not aware of an assessment being used to determine training needs.

14. **Staff receive appropriate support.** Site coordinators, for the most part, felt more than adequately supported at their sites. One site coordinator commented, "I feel the CLC program is supported in whatever we are doing." Another said, "I see the coordination as always being good. The questions in the beginning were answered and provided leadership to move forward." Another coordinator also commented that she appreciated Melissa's assistance (the project coordinator's secretary) in putting together all the government forms and keeping the paperwork in order.

In responding specifically to the support that was given by the project coordinator, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. One explained in detail,

> Sharon was just like all the site coordinators this year. We were all wandering in unfamiliar territory with this grant. She explained everything she knew to the best of her abilities. Sharon was very supportive of us and our ideas as well. Once our programs were started I saw a lot less of her, which I was fine with. If I ever had questions she was more than happy to help me. I guess in my own sense I didn't rely too heavily on her because I felt comfortable.

Others commented that the project coordinator "empowered" them to work out difficulties, but "was still with us in consulting." And another said that "she has always supported me with any ideas I wanted to try."

In examining the role of principals in supporting the CLC's efforts, principals had several interesting comments. Two indicated that support meant making sure they had all the things they needed, like supplies and transportation. Another said it meant reassuring local childcare providers that the CLC program was not their competition. Another principal believed that support consisted of following through on the discipline, supporting the CLC teachers, and being visible in the program – but then added that this had not happened as often as she would have liked. Three of the principals believed that support meant connecting with relevant stakeholders in the district and communicating with them about the program. One said that the role of the principal is to be a "good listener, and listen to other different factors that are influenced by the after-school program...the parents, the students, the staff, and then the regular education staff." This principal added,

> As a principal, I need to work with the site coordinator and provide whatever guidance as far as a little background knowledge about some of the students and the parents, if they need to have me support them if there is a problem that has come up with parents or with other students, or whatever, that's another thing that I need to do.

15. **Administration provides sound management of the program.** The sub-standards under this standard include providing a sufficient budget to support the program's goals. The budget was evidently sufficient as there was a large carryover that was requested by the project coordinator. Consequently, sites had sufficient materials and supplies and personnel to carry out all necessary responsibilities in the program. The program coordinator became an expert at networking and locating resources that had minimal cost to the program. A regional Advisory Council was formed early in the program and met on a regular basis throughout the year to provide long-term planning and direction in daily decision-making, especially on issues such as recruitment policies faced by the sites. The evaluator met intermittently throughout the year with the project coordinator to plan and coordinate an ongoing formal evaluation process. A mid-year evaluation provided useful data to the program staff to assess program progress and use the data for continuous improvement purposes.

16. **Policies and procedures responsive to needs of children/families.** The program's philosophy and goals are laid out in the program design which has been the basis for the operation of the program. Every decision that has been made about the program is a reflection on the model. While all components have not had an equally successful implementation, all components are in the process of being implemented. The program has been affordable to families, charging them $1.00 per day per child during the first year of operation. For those parents who can not afford the fees, SRS has provided subsidies to cover cost for these children. The program's hours have been flexible based on parents' needs. While this has sometimes been detrimental in children receiving less benefits than others, due to a shortened attendance period, this adjustment meets parents' needs. All of the sites have enrolled children that have unique and special needs with one site coordinator indicating that her program consisted of over 95% at-risk children. One program initially experienced difficulty in trying to accommodate children who had severe behavioral and emotional needs.

Recommendation:

- Perhaps in future years, alternative strategies may be required to assist these programs in meeting the needs of children identified with special needs.

Discussion of NSACA Administrative Standards

In summary of the NSACA Administration Standards addressed in the NEKCLC, out of a possible point value of 256, the evaluator has rated this category as 232 or given the regional program a 91% rating. In relationship to the NSACA standards, areas that might be examined include such things as how the CLC staff assists families in communicating and working more effectively with the schools, how the CLC program notifies parents about community resources to meet the needs of children and their families; the space issue (especially at the Effingham site) and storage concerns for several of the site coordinators; and how to work more effectively with students identified with special needs.

Recommendation:

- The NSACA standards provide a valuable tool for evaluating after-school programs and perhaps could be used as a guide for site coordinators and their staff to engage in self-reflection on their programs and a beginning point to determine where program improvement is required.

G. CLCs as Center of the Community

The answer to this question has been addressed throughout this evaluation report. During the initial year of operation the priority seemed to lie with getting the program up and running so that the children would be the primary beneficiaries. Attempts were made to involve the larger community, i.e, parents and community members through several means such as dinners and performances for community members and families, open-houses where families were invited to attend the CLC programs, "Love and Logic" parenting skills training, surveys to ascertain parent needs, community-based service to organizations within the communities, and provision of volunteering opportunities for community members.

Recommendation:

- Now that the program is well established, energy needs to focus on this component as well.

H. Collaboration with School Staff and Community Organizations

The answer to this question is also embedded in this evaluation report. Specifically see numbers 4 and 5 under the Administration Standards component in F (Comparison to Quality Criteria) that illustrates the quality of the communication process between the CLCs and the school staff and how the CLCs interfaced with community and community-based organizations.

I. Satisfaction/Impact of the CLC

Writing the grant and successfully winning the money to support five after-school programs seems like the easy part of this process. The far more difficult aspect is the actual implementation of the program – hiring and training the staff, securing adequate resources/materials, ensuring commitment from the schools – the teachers, principals and support staff, gaining parents' confidence to send their children to this program,

and finally, providing a program in which children want to willingly participate. And yet, in the span of one short year, all this happened with well over100 children from northeast Kansas being able to experience this educationally sound and meaningful opportunity.

Based on the findings enumerated in this evaluation report, the obvious conclusion is that the vast majority of all stakeholder groups were extremely satisfied with the NEKCLC program and the individual sites. Satisfaction from the program was based on all the needs the program met – from providing a safe place where students could go after the school day; to the academic assistance they received, especially with their homework; to the way the program engendered in children an increase in their self-esteem; and given the fact that the program exemplified a community of children where they were able to interact and support each other across age and grade levels. Perhaps a statement made by one parent best sums up the general feeling that stakeholders had about the program which was, "We feel this program is the best thing that has happened relating to school in our community!"

While several problems and issues emerged over the course of the year and while there were several teachers who did not feel the program was a worthwhile activity, or several parents who decided that the program did not meet their needs, or several children who said they preferred not to attend, these comprised an insignificant number given the numbers of persons (i.e., parents, children, teachers, principals, Advisory Council members, community volunteers, and program staff) who adamantly supported the program, expressed their satisfaction and gratitude for the program, and believed that the program accomplished what it set out to do.

J. Conclusions and Implications

In looking at the best practices that occurred across NEKCLC program sites it seems that certain characteristics emerged that contributes to the quality of the CLC program design. Given the findings, discussion, and recommendations shared in this evaluation report, the following constitute, what this evaluator believes to be characteristics of quality after-school programs.

1. A program model grounded in social development theory and resilience research and deliberate decisions made about the program activities and thoughts about how each contributes to the program model goals and increases students' sense of resilience. In addition to having a sound model, programs must provide the necessary professional development and support to ensure that the model components are understood and are being implemented to the fullest extent possible.

2. If supplemental programs like these are going to be successful it will be necessary to secure teacher input and involvement in the design and implementation of the program to ensure buy-in and support. Teachers also need to be helped to see how after-school programs can assist them in the teaching process, otherwise they may feel threatened when the program seems to be having a degree of success with students they are unable to reach. Teachers overt resistance can actually sabotage program outcomes.

3. Time built into the model at the beginning of the after-school program period where all children can process their school day – sharing things about their day and having time to debrief what occurred during the day. This provides an excellent time to develop interpersonal and social skills as well as skills of communication – both listening and speaking. It also gives the children an opportunity to have their voices heard and contributes to building

healthy relationships among and between children. Most importantly it may provide the kind of "family time" that so many children today are missing in their lives.

4. An adequate amount of time to spend doing recreational activities where children can play with each other in structured and unstructured activities. It is important for staff to participate with the children as well, as this provides an additional opportunity to attend to children's personal and social needs.

5. Going back to the "one room schoolhouse" concept, those sites that organized their programs around mixed grade levels seemed to engender more opportunities for children to learn from each other in formal and informal settings. Peer and cross-age tutoring naturally happened in these programs. When children are isolated by age or grade level it seems that there are missed opportunities for this type of rich interaction and potential for learning and individual growth. This is one of the values of being an after-school program – not having to look like the traditional school setting.

6. Hands-on, experiential, and project-based learning seem to really motivate and excite the children. They are learning and don't even realize it. Through learning of this nature, hopefully the after-school programs will provide a model to the regular school program that children can learn and have fun at the same time. Learning doesn't have to mean work that is a drudgery and unjoyful!

7. There are many ways to reinforce basic math and reading skills and concepts, as has been shown through the various after-school program activities, without having to do laborious worksheets and "drill and kill" practices. While these certainly have their place, we are obligated as educators to find ways to extend learning in alternative ways. Consequently, finding a balance between time spent on homework completion and enrichment activities is a necessity.

8. Involving the community (through volunteers, service-learning, or community service) has benefits in connecting the children to their communities and can have educational benefits when children are shown how their learning can be applied in authentic and practical ways. Service-learning is an excellent way to accomplish both community involvement while it reinforces learning at the same time.

9. Quality programs must have an evaluation component built-in to the program that facilitates an evaluation of the ecology of the program – the entire process and all its various component parts. Such an evaluation will provide summative data so that planners and implementers are aware of program outcomes and the degree of success in meeting these. But more importantly, this type of an evaluation process will also provide valuable information that will assist planners and implementers in understanding the program and give insights into how to continually improve the program.

10. Before after-school programs address the issue of sustainability, they first must ensure a quality program worthy of sustaining. If local stakeholders believe the program is worthwhile, they will find it necessary to generate the monies to continue the support.

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Endnotes

1. Since the inception of the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers in the mid to late 90s, the RFP has specified a strong evaluation design. See the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2001). *21st Century Community Learning Centers Program: Application for Grants, CFDA #84.287*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 6-7.

2. For the past 20 years, Michelle Seligson has played a critical role in highlighting the importance of the out-of-school hours and in building the policy, program, and research base that helped bring the field into its current stage of dramatic expansion. She founded the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and has conducted research on the quality of relationships in after-school care. See Hart, K. (2000). Questions and answers: Interview with Michelle Seligson. *The Evaluation Exchange, VI (1)*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 8-9.

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6. Stufflebeam, 128.

7. Guba and Lincoln.

8. Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

9. Ibid., 186.

10. Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research, in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2.

11. The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) Standards were developed to establish a baseline of quality and the reassurance that programs are committed to providing each child with a unique growing and learning experience. The NSACA Standards describe improvement benchmarks for programs supporting children, ages 5-14. NSACA's Standards are based on the national Institute on Out of School Time instrument, Assessing School-Age Child-Care Quality (ASQ), which was adapted and field-tested in an accreditation pilot involving over 100 programs throughout the nation. ASQ is a self-study tool useful for program improvement. The instrument was gifted to NSACA in 1998 for the purpose of creating national standards for child-care program accreditation. See National School-Age Child Care Alliance, Boston, MA.

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19. Hart, 9.

20. Social development theory indicates that the needs of at-risk students must be met in a number of settings including the family, the school, community and with peers. Social-development theory provides a framework to assist educators in purposefully planning activities to meet the needs of ar-risk students and strengthen community, school and family capacities for academic and pro-social development. See Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F. and Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: Implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*, 64-105.

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